

*Rep. Sires voted to require the Secretary of Health and Human Services to negotiate with drug companies*

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(Washington, D.C.) - Congressman Albio Sires voted today to repeal the provision that prohibits the Secretary of Health and Human Services from negotiating with drug companies for lower prices for Medicare beneficiaries. This allows the agency to exert its bargaining power with drug companies to benefit millions of seniors and disabled persons.

"It is our job to take care of those most in need. Medicare beneficiaries should have the peace of mind of knowing that they are paying the lowest possible price for their medicines," said Congressman Albio Sires. "Bargaining for lower prices will not hurt the industry but will allow more flexibility and keep high prices in check."

The 2003 Medicare Rx Drug Law, that created the prescription drug plan, included a provision that prohibited the government from negotiating with drug companies for lower prices. This bill requires HHS to conduct cost-saving negotiations.

H.R. 4 also provides the Secretary with broad discretion on how best to implement the negotiating authority. The bill does not require a particular list of covered drugs to be used by Medicare prescription drug plans, nor does it prohibit access to any specific prescription medication.

The Department of Health and Human Services will be closely monitored. H.R. 4 requires updates starting June 1, 2007 to be presented to various Congressional Committees as well as a report on the negotiations conducted by the Secretary.

"We should use our system of checks and balances to ensure seniors and the disabled pay less for their prescription drugs," said Congressman Sires.